

Technical Assistance Paper #2

Role of an Economic Developer

An Information Age

It's no secret that many of our most vibrant communities are those that employ an economic developer. The broad range of activities they engage in includes facilitating community improvements, assisting in the creation of new businesses, and marketing their communities to expanding industries. A community's vision of what it wants to be is often reflected by its economic development program.

The Developer To The Community

Specific activities of an economic developer vary from town to town depending on the unique resources of each community. A successful economic developer harnesses those resources in ways that increase the wealth and quality of life. For example, a town on an interstate, near St. Louis or Kansas City, may simply need to manage growth. A farming community on a state road, on the other hand, or a community surrounded by national forest land, may need a program that spurs additional economic opportunity and halts outward migration.

To be successful, an economic developer's focus must be broad. Wooing a factory into town for example may require job training programs, housing programs, infrastructure improvements, and a selective targeted business recruitment program. An economic developer who does not address a broad range of conditions is likely to accomplish very little.

The Community To The Developer

Keep in mind that economic development is a subset of community development, and as such is ultimately the responsibility of the community, not a hired gun. An economic developer cannot succeed alone. Different strategies will involve various community groups. Downtown revitalization often requires a small army of volunteers, as do many kinds of community improvement projects. Bond issues for infrastructure or other improvements must be approved by popular referendum.

Companies looking to locate in a community often prefer to meet with a delegation of local citizens, not just one individual. In other words, the community's commitment to economic development does not end

when it hires an economic developer. It is the responsibility of the community to remain involved and active in its economic development program.

The Job Description

One of the means by which the community and the developer may work together to assure that a broad range of conditions are addressed in their economic development program is a well-written job description.

A job description is an official document that sets forth the parameters of any given position. When hiring, it is used to establish the background and educational requirements for prospective employees. Once hired, it provides a broad outline of the activities of that employee. As economic developers must address a range of issues, it is the responsibility of the community to provide a broad job description that directs the economic developer to engage in a wide array of activities.

A Sample Job Description

TITLE: Economic Developer

PURPOSE OF POSITION: To increase economic opportunities through activities that improve the business climate and quality of life of the community.

SUPERVISION: Under the direct supervision of (name of sponsoring organization).

ACCOUNTABILITIES; Work in conjuncture with community organizations to accomplish six general objectives.

- 1) Assist existing employees to become more competitive;
- 2) Encourage new employees from within the community;
- 3) Attract new employers from outside the community;
- 4) Develop strategies for capturing more local consumer dollars;
- 5) Access outside sources of capital;

6) Assist the improvements of infrastructure, recreational, and cultural facilities.

Specific activities may focus on specific sections of the community, but the total work effort must encompass all segments. Performance measurements will emphasis improvements in the quality of life of the community, as well as economic gains.

KNOWLEDGE, SKILLS, AND ABILITIES:

! Knowledge of the community development process and approaches to citizen participation.

! Ability to communicate and work effectively with state, federal, and local officials, civic and grassroots organizations, representatives from business and individuals from a variety of backgrounds.

! Ability to develop leadership skills of local citizens and work with volunteers.

! Knowledge of general business principles and economic factors as they relate to business profitability and plant locations.

! Ability to work independently without close supervision.

! Ability to diagnose conditions, gather information, and plan, coordinate, and analyze research projects necessary for carrying out economic development.

! Ability to prepare and operate under a budget/

! Computer literate.

EDUCATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS; Degree in community or economic development, public administration, business administration, or marketing preferred.